

John Paul told us, “Be not afraid,” because he knew that an empire built on lies was ultimately destined to fail. By reminding us that our freedom and dignity rests on truths about man and his nature, Pope John Paul II set off one of the greatest revolutions for freedom the world has ever known.

Pope John Paul has now been succeeded by one of his closest friends and colleagues, Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Benedict, when he was a Cardinal, and recently—when he was a Cardinal, Laura and I had a chance to meet him, and recently she went back to Rome to see him again. He was such a gracious host, wonderfully kind man.

Like his predecessor, Pope Benedict understands that the measure of a free society is how it treats the weakest and most vulnerable among us. In his Christmas homily, the Pope noted that the Savior came to Earth as a defenseless child, and said that the splendor of that Christmas shines upon every child, born and unborn. Here in the United States, we work to strengthen a culture of life through many State and Federal initiatives that expand the protections of the unborn. These initiatives reflect the consensus of the American people acting through their elected representatives, and we will continue to work for the day when every child is welcome in life and protected in law.

I appreciate the leading role that the Catholic faith-based organizations play in our nation’s armies of compassion. And one of the many ways that Catholic faith-based organizations serve their neighbors is by welcoming newcomers and helping them become good citizens.

This Nation of ours is having an important debate about immigration, and it is vitally important that this debate be conducted in a civil tone. I believe that the American Dream is open to all who work hard and play by the rules and that America does not have to choose between being a compassionate society and a society of law.

An immigration system that forces people into the shadows of our society or leaves them prey to criminals is a system that needs to be changed. I’m confident that we can change—change our immigration system in ways that secures our border, respects the rule of law, and, as importantly, upholds the

decency of our country. As the Congress continues this debate, its Members must remember, we are a nation of immigrants. And immigration has helped restore our soul on a regular basis.

In this young century, our Nation has been called to great duties. I’m confident we’ll meet our responsibilities so long as we continue to trust in God’s purposes. During our time in the White House, Laura and I have been blessed by the prayers of countless Americans, including many in this room. It’s really an amazing country where people walk up to you, say, “Mr. President, I pray for you”—expecting to say, “Mr. President, I’d like a bridge.” [Laughter] But instead, they say, “I pray for you and your family.” It uplifts us, and I want to thank you for that from the bottom of our hearts.

I ask for your prayers again, that our Nation may always be an inspiration to those who believe that God made every man, woman, and child for freedom. It is such an honor to be here. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Most Rev. Jose H. Gomez, Archbishop of San Antonio, who introduced the President; Theodore E. Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington; Anthony J. Cardinal Bevilacqua, Archbishop Emeritus of Philadelphia; Jane M. Roberts, wife of Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr.; and Suzanne M. Nicholson, wife of Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson.

Remarks on the National Economy

April 7, 2006

Good morning. This morning’s economic report shows that America’s growing economy added 211,000 jobs in the month of March. The American economy has now added jobs for 31 months in a row, created more than 5.1 million new jobs for American workers. The unemployment rate is now down to 4.7 percent—that’s below the average rate of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

These millions of new jobs are evidence of an economic resurgence that is strong, broad, and benefiting all Americans. Real

after-tax income has grown by more than 8 percent per person since I took office. That means, on average, Americans have an income that is \$2,100 higher this year than it was in 2001, after adjusting for inflation.

More Americans own their homes than at any time in history. Minority homeownership has reached record levels. Consumer confidence is at its highest point in nearly 40 years; productivity is high; inflation is contained; manufacturing activity is growing; and the small-business sector is thriving.

The economy has expanded for 17 straight quarters. And last year, the American economy grew at a healthy rate of 3.5 percent. That's the fastest rate of any major industrialized economy.

These gains are the result of the energy and the effort of American workers, small-business owners, and entrepreneurs. They are also the result of pro-growth economic policies. The tax cuts I signed left \$880 billion with our Nation's workers, small-business owners, and families. They've used that money to fuel our economic resurgence.

Not everyone in Washington agreed with the decision to let people keep more of their own money. On the day that Republicans in the House and Senate were finalizing the 2003 tax cuts, one Democratic leader said these cuts would, quote, "do nothing to create jobs." Facts have proven the critics wrong 5.1 million times over.

Tax relief has done exactly what it was designed to do—it's created jobs and growth for the American people. Yet some are now proposing that we raise taxes, either by repealing the tax cuts or letting them expire. These are the same politicians who told us that letting Americans—letting America's working families keep more of their own money would be irresponsible, reckless, and shameful. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now. Our economy grows when the American people make the decisions about how to save, spend, and invest their money. To keep our economy creating jobs and opportunity, Congress needs to show its trust in the American people and make the tax relief permanent.

Congress also needs to restrain spending so we can stay on track to cut the deficit in half by 2009. And if necessary, I will en-

force spending restraint through the exercise of the veto. The American people expect their leaders to address other key leaders—that directly affect their family budgets and bottom line, especially health care and energy.

When the cost of energy and health care rise, families are squeezed and small businesses suffer. I proposed practical reforms that would make health care more available and affordable. I put forward an energy initiative that will make our dependence on Middle Eastern oil a thing of the past. I've also laid out a plan to make America more competitive by increasing our investment in scientific research, encouraging research and development in the private sector, and improving math and science education.

I urge the Congress to move forward on all these important priorities so we can keep America the economic leader of the world and allow more families and small businesses to realize the American Dream.

Thank you for your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:32 a.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

April 1

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing.

April 3

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. He then had a telephone conversation with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. Later, he traveled to Cincinnati, OH, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Eugene Goss and Keith and Carolyn Maupin, parents of Sgt.